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ABSTRACT

It is time for the state of Georgia to adopt a policy mandating professors of reading education, state level bureaucrats, and district level reading supervisors overseeing reading programs to return to the classroom every three to five years for a designated period of service as reading teachers. Just as classroom teachers undergo inservice training, so should the upper level professionals. Benefits include giving the teacher educator first-hand observation of the changes in (1) the demographics and abilities of the student population; (2) the everyday activities and current attitudes of the teaching force; and (3) the school environment as a whole. In addition, the professor is provided with an opportunity to develop practical insights into new pedagogical theories, to field test curricular projects and to conduct applied research. (RS)

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BACK TO THE TRENCHES, YOU PEDAGOGICAL DOGS!

Norman A. Stahl

Let me acknowledge a point before you read further along in this column. After reading the suggestion I'm about to make, some 200 readers will be horrified or will immediately burst forth in nervous laughter. In either case, they will start to click off in their minds a list of reasons why my proposition is ludicrous. On the other hand, I actually expect a vast majority of the readership to say something to the extent of "RIGHT ON" (Sorry my '60's are showing). It's about time that someone had the audacity to put forth such a proposal.

If I've got your curiosity up, let me ask that you read on a bit further while I direct several questions to my fellow reading teachers serving in the public and private institutions of the state. When was the last time you had to enroll in a course offered by a college of education to upgrade your professional knowledge? When was the last time you attended a series of inservice workshops? The vast majority of you can come up with an approximate date with little or no trouble. Retraining is part of your professional lives, and, as in several other states, we can expect that laws will eventually come into effect in Georgia mandating formal retraining/recertification cycles throughout one's professional career. Clearly, it is an indisputable fact that professionals out in the trenches undergo the inservice process (good or bad) on a regular basis.

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Now on the other hand, how many professors, inservice specialists, or administrators regularly providing such inservice or retraining experiences have actually taught reading for any extended period of time within the recent past. Let's be sure to understand that for a majority of the members of this group, supervising student teachers or conducting applied research simply does not correspond to teaching on a regular basis in an elementary or a secondary classroom, or for that matter, in a developmental studies class. While supervision and research activities bring college faculty and administrators into the schools, in either case, they are there as observers rather than active participants in the teaching/learning process.

A Faculty Participation Proposal

If you're reading between the lines, you know that the proposal I'm about to make wouldn't win me any friends with the state's pedagogues. Nevertheless, it's time that the state adopt a policy mandating professors of reading education along with state-level bureaucrats and district-level reading supervisors overseeing reading programs to return to the classroom every three to five years for a designated period of service as reading teachers.

Now I'll be the first to admit that this proposal is not on the forefront of radical educational thought. The idea is simply one

that we have not been willing to approach openly because with all the obvious merits to the suggestion, it also opens the proverbial can of worms. Yet there is not a teacher in the state who has not muttered, at one time or another, that the presumed specialist leading a workshop should really come back to reality (i.e., the classroom).

In years past, upper-level professionals always had the option of spending a certain amount of time in college affiliated lab schools or district sponsored teacher training academies. Even though these schools did not always perfectly mirror the schools in the area, opportunities were always available for pedagogical revitalization. In a sense, the loss of these institutions during the last decade destroyed an important link between upper-level reading educators and the world of the classroom teacher. However, the situation may be changing for the better. The state of California, as one example, believes that teacher educators should serve in the classroom on a regular basis. Now it's time for educators in Georgia to consider such a proposition or even to support legislation mirroring California's S.B. 813.

Benefits and Examples of Faculty Participation Projects

What then are some of the benefits of a "Faculty Participation" project? First and foremost, such an experience permits the teacher educator a first-hand observation of the changes in (1)

the demographics and abilities of the student population, (2) the everyday activities and current attitudes of the teaching force, and (3) the school environment as a whole. Secondly, the professor is provided with an opportunity to develop practical insights to new pedagogical theories, to field test curricular projects and to conduct applied or action research. Obviously, there is also the expectation that the experience will provide the professor with an updated degree of credibility with students enrolled in graduate coursework.

Now let me give you an example of a suceessful faculty participation experience that took place several years ago. In this case we are talking about an exchange program where a full professor in the Elementary Education Department at San Francisco State University chose to teach at a middle school for an entire school year. At the same time, a master teacher from the school district received release time to cover the professor's methods classes at the university. From the onset the oddsmakers were expecting 25 sixth graders to wear down one middleaged professor within short order. The professor will tell you that the first few weeks were nothing short of being back in boot camp, but, as the year progressed, it was obvious that all involved were benefiting from a unique pedagogical project. By the end of the year, the university had gained a faculty member with a current view of the day to day life of a middle school undergoing radical population shifts. The school district gained

a master teacher who was revitalized from working directly with a university faculty, master teachers from other districts, and several groups of idealistic student teachers.

Another category of faculty participation can be labeled as a professor in residence project. In one such project, a professor was assigned to work directly with the Director of Reading for a major metropolitan school district. Throughout the school year these individuals worked together closely in an attempt to revamp the district's reading program. On a daily basis the professor was in the schools where he was either conducting training sessions, implementing new reading projects or working directly with children while conducting microteaching demonstrations. During this year, members of the school district's reading office undertook reciprocal activities at the college as they taught basic methods courses to teachers in training. As might be expected, some of the projects undertaken were successful while others were not quite so successful. Yet overall, a solid bond developed between the district's leadership, the reading department at the college, and the teachers in the schools where curricular changes were undertaken during the year.

A third example of a program that allowed for faculty participation (an on-site training institute) was evidenced by the Pilot Program of the San Francisco Center for Advanced

Teacher Development (see ERIC document #085-386). One of the primary goals of this summer school project was to provide advanced training in reading pedagogy to a group of seasoned teachers. The school district and the university cooperatively offered a multiracial summer school program that drew students from the district at large. As the school day progressed, teachers attended graduate level classes given on the school site. An offshoot of the program was that professors teaching the courses were able to work with teachers and children in the classrooms as course projects were field tested and evaluated cooperatively. In more cases than not professors became actively involved in the ongoing instructional program.

Finally, a current example of facuty participation has permitted one of the authors of Hooked on Books (Fader, Duggins & Finn, 1976) to implement a trade book program in an educational setting providing unique challenges to the philosophy underlying the "Hooked on Books" concept. In this case Duggins worked directly with a group of Latino students enrolled in an inner-city middle school. The ongoing experience allowed the author to test and to valdiate many of the ideas suggested in the text. In a sense, we see a faculty participation experience intertwined with action research or field testing as new lessons are developed and refinements to previously published suggestions are undertaken.

Implementating Faculty Participation

The implementation of a faculty participation at the state level is by no means an easy task as it demands from the onset interaction and close coordination of actions between several state agencies. Later the same degree of careful coordination must be demonstrated between the cooperating school districts, and state agencies or institutions of higher education. Yet the major problem associated with the implementation of faculty participation projects is not with the articulation required between agencies or the initial grumblings we can expect from those who will be returnning to the classroom (I've yet to meet a faculty member who, after completing such an experience, did not find it to be quite beneficial).

The major problem will be in funding such a program on a state wide basis. While the cost of providing release time for college faculty to serve in the schools is not exorbitant, none the less, it is a factor that must be considered. Over the years, we have all observed the problems that arise in trying to implement quality educational programs when the appropriate funds have not been allocated in advance.

In cases where exchange programs can be developed between school districts and other participating educational agencies (colleges, state offices, etc.), the costs can be minimized. In fact, a relatively cost free exchange might involve an advanced

graduate student undergoing an internship experience at a postsecondary institution or in a state agency while an individual from the corresponding office partook in a faculty participation experience at the respective public school.

A second problem would no doubt surface at the college level. Faculty members participating in the experience must be guaranteed that such activities would indeed be valued as part of the promotion, tenure and salary process. Yet, this problem would eventually fall by the wayside as all members of the education faculty would be part of the faculty participation cycle, and hence, they would no doubt develop the appropriate policies to overcome potential problems.

A final problem entails finding opportunties for administrators of reading education programs and other individuals who are campus-bound to have faculty participation experiences. One viable answer would be for the chairs of reading departments to teach remedial or developmental college reading classes while under the tutelage of college reading specialists. Such an option not only facilitates the retooling process for administrators but also promotes new opportunities for cross-campus interaction between college-based reading specialists and reading educators.

Closing Comments

No doubt there are additional problems associated with the implementation of a faculty participation program for Georgia. Nevertheless, the long term benefits that can be reaped from a successful program far outweight the minor problems and the ego-centered inconveniences that might be expected if such a plan were to be adopted. As with any program advocating reform or change in education, the key to successful implementation must be the identification of concerned,interested professionals drawn from the postsecondary institutions, the school systems and the professional associations in the state. These individuals would then be charged with the development of a state of the art, formative evaluation proposal for a faculty participation program. From this activity one can envision a successful faculty participation program benefiting professionals from each of the represented groups, and, through either direct or "trickle down" effects, all the students enrolled in the schools of Georgia.

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